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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 010748

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/02/2020
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: RAISING ONGOING BAHAI PERSECUTION WITH THE GOT

REF: ISTANBUL 0006

Classified By: EUR PDAS NANCY MCELDFOWNEY FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

[1](#)1. (U) This is an action request; please see paragraph 3.

BACKGROUND

[1](#)2. (C) Seven Baha,i community leaders arrested in March and May 2008 in Iran are currently on trial in a revolutionary court in Iran. After being postponed twice, the closed session trial began on January 12, but subsequent dates for further trial proceedings are not known. Nobel Laureate Shirin Ebadi who advocated on behalf of the Baha,i seven said in a Washington TV interview on January 13 that Iranian authorities allowed only two of the defendant,s lawyers into the courtroom. The seven are charged with espionage and propaganda activities against the Islamic order, the establishment of an illegal administration, cooperation with Israel and the sending of secret documents, acting against the security of the country and &corruption on earth.⁸ There is no evidence against them, but the charges represent commonly levied and unsubstantiated accusations against Baha,is

[1](#)3. (C) Reftel A notes that the Baha,i community is worried that the Iranian government is speeding up the judicial trail in an attempt to win quick convictions. Our Baha,i contacts also tell us that the Iranian government is issuing sharp rhetoric blaming the Baha,i organization for recent unrest. Baha,i rights organizations also note that arrests of Baha,is continue, including 12 during the Ashura protests on December 27. Currently, we are aware of at least 48 Baha,is imprisoned in Iran.

Action Request

4.(C) In light of Turkey,s pragmatic relationship with Iran and its generally good relations with the Baha,i community residing in Turkey, the Department believes that discrete Turkish engagement could -- at minimum -- secure some additional legal rights for the seven Baha,is. Iran has been responsive to international pressure in the past, and Baha,i contacts tell us repeatedly that high-level engagement through public statements or requests usually results in a minor improvement for the detainees, whether it be additional time with lawyers or family visits.

Suggested Talking Points

[1](#)5. (SBU) Suggesting Talking Points:

-- International concern is mounting over the fate of the

seven Baha,i leaders currently facing trial in Iran. The EU, USG, Canada, and Brazil expressed their concern over the treatment of the Baha,is.

-- Iran,s continued persecution of Baha,is and other religious minorities, including Muslims, is damaging Iran,s international standing and undermining the perceived justice and the legitimacy of the Government.

-- We urge you to use your discussions with Iran to help improve the situation and fate of the seven imprisoned Baha,i leaders in Iran and underscore the concern of the international community.

-- Our Baha,i contacts tell us that high-level intervention can improve conditions of the Baha,is in jail, as authorities often grant additional family or lawyer visits to the detainees in response.

-- The seven Baha,is have not been afforded their legal rights under Iran,s own constitution or received their legal protections under the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is party.

-- The seven have had limited access to their lawyers, authorities detained one of their attorneys, and the attorneys have not had access to the state,s evidence. Pre-trial hearings were held in private, which is also contrary to Iranian law. (NOTE: The Baha,is believe that access to lawyers, although limited, was only granted because of international pressure coming from countries like the U.S. END NOTE.)

-- Raising this issue could help persuade the Iranian government to allow the Baha,is to exercise legal rights under Iranian law.

-- We urge Turkey to ask Iran to halt its discrimination against the Baha,is. Recent statements that have appeared in Iranian state-controlled media and newspapers like &Kayhan8 and from religious figures fuel intolerance. Ask that the Government of Iran tone down its rhetoric against the Baha,is.

-- If the trial proceeds in a manner that continues to deny the Baha,i defendants their legal rights (or in the worst case, condemns the seven to death), it will further tarnish Iran,s international standing and may complicate Turkey,s engagement with Iran.

16. (U) Department appreciates post,s assistance in this matter.

17. (U) Department requests timely responses. Please send responses to Alexander Shrank, EUR/SE; Laura Carey, DRL/AE; Jill Hutchings, DRL/NESCA; Justin Kern, DRL/IRF; and Michael Spring, NEA/IR.
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